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Present Day Evils and Public Sentiment

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Before the Alumni and Members of the Washington Literary Society
and the Faculty and Students of the University of Virginia

How many of us sailing on this ship of state, even when we feel her quiver from the impact of stupendous forces, tossing her first hither, then thither, consider whence come these forces,—whither go they? Yet, to understand and determine whether or not there is danger, we must first know the causes and then the effects of these irresistible forces.

It is peculiarly your province, gentlemen, set apart here, as you have been or now are,—alumni or students of this great seat of learning,—to investigate, ascertain, and, having learned, to proclaim the significance of this political movement which is now shaking from stem to stern our ship of state, in order that others might benefit from your knowledge. These forces, for want of a better name, I will call insurgent; insurgent, however, without its factional or party significance; insurgent, in the sense of protestation against existing conditions, political, industrial and social. Let us enumerate, then, some of these present day conditions, which the mass of our people denounce as evils, and at the same time let us consider their whence, and their whither.

Our enumeration is, of course, not intended to be complete. We are picking out only a few of the most obvious and most comprehensive of these alleged evils.

FIRST. There is a general outcry against political corruption and the control of political parties by rings or bosses for private purposes rather than for public good.

SECOND. There is an almost equally loud protest against the monopoly or control of industry by the few, at the cost of the many, and thereby the building up a plutocracy with impoverishment of the masses.

THIRD. It is maintained that under existing conditions the individual is denied reasonable opportunity for the improvement of his physical, intellectual, moral and financial condition; that he is constrained in seeking his natural rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The evils of which complaint are made as a manifestation of our times, are the logical sequence of causes, which we must consider, in order that we may remove the effects. The unrest, the public discontent, the insurgent movement, are evidence that the people are taking an inventory of their institutions, and are striving for something with which those conditions, against which they protest, are in conflict.

On the one side, it is charged, we have government in the hands of the ring and the boss, controlled by the dominant influence of big business; we have industry in the control of big business; and the individual, cramped and deprived of his rights, politically, industrially and socially. On the other side, we have a people seeking to obtain and maintain direct control of the government, and, through it, of industry and the social condition of the individual. These are the paramount issues of our times. Our country, in my opin-

ion, never faced issues more momentous, on the determination of which, its future more depended.

This insurgent movement is not yet full grown. It is in the making. It does not, perhaps, completely comprehend or fully appreciate, its own ultimate aim. It is still in its first stage,—the stage of negation, rather than in its final stage,—the stage of construction. There is unrest, criticism, demand for change, but have the insurgents framed a definite policy when, and if, the changes, for which they are striving, shall have come?

It is doubtful if the insurgents realize that if the masses shall have once gained direct control of the government, and through the government ownership or regulation of industry, direct control of industry,—and thereby the power to control and regulate the social status of the citizen,—that to wisely and beneficently exercise the power thus gained, will require of the majority, a citizenship of a character so high, in fact, of such character as that with which no country in the world has yet been blessed. Do their plans and purposes comprehend the preparation of such citizenship? Have they considered the time required; the cultivation of the public sentiment; the popular opinion, such government presupposes? The hope of such citizenship in a majority, exercising their powers unselfishly, in the interest of all, is not strengthened by our past political history.

After we had called the attention of mankind to our "inalienable rights," had established our independence, and sought to guarantee that independence and those rights by our Constitution, the mass of our citizens buried themselves in their personal affairs, and gave little thought and less attention to that govern-

ment which it was then fondly hoped, was the last word in democracy. The political party was not contemplated by the framers of our Constitution. No reference thereto is made therein. There is abundant evidence that "the fathers" abhorred party, calling it by the opprobrious epithet, "faction." It will be remembered that Washington selected for his cabinet both Hamilton and Jefferson, men of absolutely opposing views on national government. Students of political affairs advise us, that had it not been for the cohering ties of party, our form of government would not have succeeded. The party—the political party—became the "extra legal power" of our government, and in party, rather than in office, was concentrated and centralized the real power. The great mass of our people were too much preoccupied conquering the continent, to devote much time to politics. They were pioneers, on the frontier of development, reclaiming a continent from the savage and from the wilderness. The party, therefore, made the nominations, conducted the elections, divided the offices, and was controlled by professional politicians. In the beginning, the professional politician was not so much despised. He seemed a necessary evil, doing, without pay, the work of the people. His opportunities to serve his selfish interests were not at first so great, but gradually the opportunities grew, keeping pace with the growth of wealth and population. The party could bestow all kinds of perquisites, positions and profits. Between the railroad magnate, asking government grants, and the brothel, asking protection, there was a long list of beneficiaries of those in control of the party, and, therefore, in control of the government. The whole machinery of party, as has been said, from the local primary to the national convention, was beyond the control of the voter, and in the control of the machine. The situation has been thus

described: The state, free to bestow its treasures on its favorites, was controlled by the party, the party was controlled by the ring, the ring by the boss, and the boss by the trust. I assume that "trust" is here used in the sense of big business, and not in its usual signification.

In the years following 1850, the issues of the Civil War which was to follow, drew party lines clearly and distinctly. The years of the war, and after, during the period of reconstruction, we may well characterize as the partisan era of our government. Party ties and party allegiance were as strong, almost, as the ties of home and religion. Immediately following the Civil War we had an era of unexampled urban growth. Cities sprang up as industrial accidents, at the termini of railroads, at the development of mines, and at the erection of industrial plants. Never in the history of any country was there such a rapid change of population from agricultural to city dwellers. During this same period, science and invention developed virgin territories of wealth, pouring into the lap of every city property of value sufficient for a king's ransom. This development and invention changed the character of the government of the city from that of a mere agency of sovereignty, exercising only sovereign rights, such as preserving order, guarding health, and providing for the welfare of the community,—to a great, co-operative business enterprise, with property values beyond the dreams of avarice,—property which should have been conserved for the city and its people. It has been said that the value of the rapid transit franchises, without the tangible property, in every city of the United States exceeding 25,000 in population, was greater than that of all the other public property of the city combined. The value of the franchise for the Third Avenue street railway line in the City of New York, is greater than the whole public debt of the City of New York.

With parties controlled as they were, during this era of partisanship and urban growth, and creation of new and, before that, unknown values, for the city, it followed inevitably that those in control should appropriate to themselves these fabulous fortunes, which could be transferred from the municipality to the pockets of the boss upon the drop of the gavel, in the council chamber of the city.

Picture to yourselves, our sturdy forebears, conquering the wilderness,—brave, courageous, indomitable. Give them, as you must, the credit of their great achievement, and detract not one whit from the meed of praise that is their due. Nevertheless, it must be with a note of sadness that we acknowledge the scant attention they gave to their duties as citizens. We have today a ravished continent, its lavish abundance wasted, appropriated, destroyed; centers of population called cities, mere aggregations of brick and stone, with no thought of flesh and bone; industry, unregulated and monopolized; and political corruption, shameless and appalling. Even imagination is powerless to conceive of what today might be the position of our country, and what today could be done for all its people, if there had been a prescience which had ordered the great natural resources of the continent to be conserved in the interests of all the people, and if those enormously valuable properties belonging to the city had been preserved for the benefit of all its inhabitants.

It was only during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through the agency of steam and machinery, that for the first time enough was made to go around. Steam and machinery created a new world of surplus, in contrast with the old world of deficit. We here on this continent of lavish superabundance, had the oppor-

tunity of opportunities, in this new world of surplus. Yet it has all largely passed from the possession of the masses into the possession of the few. While the wilderness was hewn down, and the city was built up, there sprang up in the city a foul, rank, poisonous, disease-breeding, pestilential, neglected and overgrown garden of weeds,—worse far than the wilderness it had supplanted. This we now call the slum of the city. For a long time it was neglected and ignored, if not practically unobserved.

If the picture I have drawn is not prepossessing, if the arraignment of our citizenship is severe, if the conditions—political, industrial and social—which exist, are undesirable, and to some extent revolting,—nevertheless I would not have you believe that I am a pessimist, a man without hope. On the contrary, I have given you the causes, and the conditions resulting, that I might now show the wonderful strides that have been made within the last few years.

It was only since 1880 that we began to think and talk and write about political corruption. Not until then, aside from a thoughtful few, did the question interest the people generally. From that time, the question has become more and more acute, and great progress has been made. Public sentiment has been from time to time aroused, and public opinion has thrown itself, on occasions, over perfect precipices of opposition, and found its way, in spite of legal technicalities and corrupt political control, into flowing streams of wide and deep reforms. Checked from time to time, nevertheless its successes have taught public opinion its power. It has begun to realize that after all, in the last analysis, the people made the constitutions and the laws, and the people can take away the constitutions

and the laws. We have learned that in this government of ours, the final strategic position is public opinion, and the contest is on, between the opposing forces, as to which shall obtain on its side, the overwhelming weight of this public opinion.

Reform after reform, and improvement after improvement, have been made by this power of public opinion, in politics, in industry, and in the social status of the citizen. So many and so fast have been these changes for the better, that it is manifest to the thoughtful observer that there is no limit to what can be accomplished, provided always that this public opinion is directed to wise and conservative aims. An enumeration of reforms, however complete, would serve no useful purpose to this audience. Every man within the hearing of my voice, do doubt, instantly recalls to mind many which he himself has observed.

In addition to the reforms which have been carried out, never before, in the history of the world, have the people been so intent upon the consideration of social conditions, and the methods by which the same can be improved. There are societies and organizations, city, state and national, in which sincere and public-spirited men and women are devoting their time and money to the interests of mankind. We are even courageously attacking problems which heretofore every nation of the world has shunned. The social evil—so-called—has been a burning question since the earliest dawn of history. We are informed that due to its baleful effects, nations have perished, and peoples have become extinct, and yet, no nation in the world, no people, no country, no city, has ever undertaken by authority from the state, to prescribe the laws, rules and regulations by which this evil shall be temporarily

controlled, or ultimately eliminated. This is true to-day, as it has been in the past. Even despotic Russia, imperial Germany, daring France, have unloaded the determination of this question upon the police of the various cities,—a body selected to administer, not to make, law. The wisest of statesmen, for some reason unwilling to grapple with this question, have dodged it. True it is that we have certain prohibitions, certain acts denominated as crimes, but they have been passed and remain upon the statute books with the understanding that they are to be ignored, and they are ignored in practically every city in the United States, as well as in every city of the world.

The police are a body of men selected not with reference to their capacity to frame enactments, but because of their supposed qualifications to enforce them. No man would permit the police of any city in which he lived to prescribe the rules and regulations and code by which the conduct of his wife, his daughters, his sons, and his family, were to be governed, and yet heretofore every man in every city has tolerated just this condition, because the city is but the aggregate of the families of all the citizens.

The attitude of every city, state and nation of the world upon this subject has been cowardly, and it is to the credit of us here in this country, that at last the question has been taken up in an authoritative way, looking towards ultimate solution.

There has been recently introduced in the legislature of New York, a bill to provide for a Morals Commission for the city of New York, which shall have power to deal with this question of the social evil and public gambling, and shall have at its disposal a force

of 2,000 men. This will take from the police the control over the saloon, the brothel and the gambling house. This will remove from the police and from municipal politics the most fruitful source of graft and corruption, and will deprive the boss and the ring of much of their power, influence and revenue. It will accomplish, perhaps, above all else, this:—for the first time in the history of the world there will be obtainable statistical information and data, accurate and reliable, to be preserved and studied.

I might say, in passing, that it is not at all improbable that this Morals Commission, though it should be composed of the best and the wisest in the community, will possibly find itself compelled to change its preconceived policy, as experience demonstrates the error of its views. It is a new field of experiment, to be worked out upon new lines of eugenics. It is, however, one of those problems of civilization that must be solved if there is to be civilization. It is to the credit of democracy that we have undertaken the solution of this question, which, during the centuries, all other governments have dodged.

In this contest now waging, the spirit which animates the insurgent is the social spirit. Its ideal is the appropriation of the property of all for the good of all. The insurgent is directing his energies in several directions—all converging, however, to the same final goal; first, the direct control of government; secondly, the regulation of industry in the interest of the masses; and, lastly, the betterment of the social condition of the individual citizen. The unrest, protestation, demand, insurgency, are all due to the fact that these purposes of the people are opposed by the political, industrial and social conditions which now exist.

That ultimately this movement of the people, if persisted in, must win, even if opposed by constitutions, laws, the reverence for past ideals, and all other restraining forces and influences, whether political, industrial or social, must be apparent from the present trend and progress along these very lines, and from a recognition of the potentiality of an overwhelming public sentiment.

Should the Federal Constitution stand in the way of this movement, let us see what might happen, aside from its amendment in the manner provided by law. The Constitution provides: "Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defence and general welfare of the United States." By construction this clause has been interpreted as granting to Congress power to tax in order to pay the debts and provide for the common defence and general welfare. It would not be such a strained construction—and one for which many lawyers have heretofore contended—that this clause gave to Congress the power to provide for the common defence and general welfare of the United States, as well as to lay taxes for that purpose. If this construction were once made, perhaps made because demanded by an overwhelming public sentiment, there would be practically no limit to the power of the Federal Government.

The progress that has been made in the direct control of government by the people is evidenced in various ways. The direct primaries enable the people to make the nominations. The various acts regulating elections, registration, &c., help to take the control of elections from the ring. The laws providing for a direct vote for United States senators, the initiative, referendum

and recall, already adopted in some states, and their adoption demanded in most if not all the states, show the direction of the movement. In other words, the people are obtaining direct control of public nominations, the supervision of elections, the control of the representative after election, the power to initiate legislation. No student of politics can fail to see that during the last few years there have been made wonderful strides in wresting from the control of the political machine, the nomination, election and control after election, of public officials, and that control has been transferred to the voter, as well as power over legislation itself.

Control of industry, let it be remembered, is sought either by governmental ownership or governmental regulation. "What the people demand is the largest possible industrial control, together with the largest possible industrial dividend." There are abundant evidences of progress along these lines. The government has gone into business in many ways; into banking through the post office; into raising and selling timber through the Forestry Department; into almost all lines in building the Panama Canal; and it threatens to go into the express business. The states and cities of the Union have been following the Federal Government's example in many ways. But while progress in government ownership has not been so rapid, there is an avalanche of proof of progress in governmental regulation of industry. The Interstate Commerce Commission, fixing and regulating railroad rates, &c., stands conspicuous as a regulation. The corporation tax law, the Bureau of Commerce and Labor, the factory inspection and labor laws, pure food laws, minimum wage laws, employers' liability laws, &c., &c., all attest how fast we are going in the direction of regulation of industry

by government. In fact, the kings and princes of industry are not infrequently heard to complain that law has already taken out of their hands the operation of their plants.

The progress heretofore made in improving the social condition of the individual citizen is equally, if not even more, manifest than is the progress made towards securing direct control of government and the control and regulation of industry. The goal here sought to be attained by the insurgent is to improve the physical, intellectual and moral condition of the individual.

It is impossible, within the limits of this address, to even briefly summarize what has been done in this direction during the last few years. Consider the new hospitals and dispensaries, the introduction of doctors and nurses into the public schools, the penny lunches for underfed children and the clynics for defective, backward or exceptional children, the campaigns against typhoid fever and tuberculosis, the state and city health boards, the establishment of public parks, recreation grounds, play-grounds, public baths, &c., the passage of milk, meat, food and child labor laws, the enactments providing for conveniences in workshops and office, holidays, hours of labor, regulation of dangerous occupations, &c., &c. It has almost come to pass in these days, with our various laws, that society will demand for every premature death, a coroner's inquest, and that good health will be established, and death prohibited, by law.

In education, even greater strides have been made,—our public schools, from the kindergarden up, have been vastly improved and enlarged, our state colleges and universities have greatly increased, our compul-

sory education laws force education on the child, the vast increase of our libraries, periodicals, newspapers, night schools, etc., point out the advances; and quite important to be considered is that numerous holidays and half-holidays are provided, so that leisure is given to the working man and woman to improve their minds if they so desire.

The new penology—so-called—is founded upon the system of preventing, rather than punishing, crime. The name alone spells progress.

May it not come to pass that these forward movements will be increased in the next generation in geometrical progression?

Now, most important of all, what are we doing, to get ready for the change? What is our duty? Shall we pursue the same policy that our continent conquerors pursued, of neglect of foresight and public obligation, or shall we take time from our private business to give to our public business,—that business which is so pregnant with good or ill for posterity. What is the obligation which every citizen owes to his city, his state, and his nation? Has he the right to sell himself to his self-seeking selfishness, and pass politely by the call to public service? And by public service I do not mean office; I mean the ordinary duties of the citizen.

It is here that I would wish the power to obtain and hold your attention, the attention of each one of you,—you graduates and you students of this great institution of learning. Imbued with the high ideals that are here taught, many of you have gone forth, and many more will go out from these environments, into the walks of life, awaiting the opportunity, awaiting the

time and the place, to actively engage in public service. There is no need to wait. The opportunity is now, every day,—the time, every hour. You must work in the public interest, to create public sentiment, to add wisdom to the popular voice, to correct error, to propagate truth, to make one's self felt as a force, however small or however great, in this great movement which is now on. There are a thousand ways,—aye, a thousand thousand ways,—to do this, and those who have special advantages, or special ability, have special obligations to do their part.

Gentlemen, I ask you to consider the work ahead, cut out for every man of public spirit, in order that there may grow up in this country a citizenship, that will be competent to deal with the questions which the evidences of the times indicate will be imposed upon government. If the government is to be directly controlled by the people, and if industry is to be controlled by the government, and the social condition of the people likewise so controlled, then the people will be called upon to directly control industry and trade, and provide for the social status of the people.

Over ten years ago I had occasion to refer, in a public address, to the conditions affecting the trade and commerce of that day, as compared with conditions of former years. It seems to me appropriate, to repeat the same here, although vaster enterprises have been since undertaken than those to which I at that time referred.

“The capital employed in the enterprises of today may seem large when compared with the amount thus employed at one time, but it is no larger in proportion than are the transactions of this age compared with those of former ages. Once all trade was circum-

scribed, confined within small territorial areas, due to lack of facilities for transportation and communication. The market places of cities and towns in the past were the sole marts sometimes of whole counties, or even larger districts. Today what is the situation? The price of a loaf of bread in Chicago is affected by a rumor of war in Asia, and the world's exchange goes up or down in accordance with the result of negotiations for a loan in Japan. Everything of importance occurring in the most remote portions of the world affects trade for good or evil in every other portion. Rumors of war or peace, the discovery of mineral deposits, a new and useful invention in any part of the world, reacts upon every other part. The whole world is every man's market. Transactions involving sums equal to a king's ransom are now of almost daily occurrence, and millions are now exchanged where hundreds once sufficed. Contracts for the supply of material involving tens of millions of dollars are not infrequent. The amount of capital employed in any enterprise signifies nothing except the magnitude of our dealings. These enormous amounts are not limited to companies formed by consolidation; they are likewise employed in business enterprise increased from small beginnings, by natural accretions, to keep step with the industrial progress and demands of the time.

The unification of the world into a single market place has come to pass through no human design, but as the natural result of improved facilities in transportation and communication. A man today in any part of the world may be in daily touch with his business, however remote; and with the markets in every other portion of the globe. These changed conditions have caused like changes in methods of business. Trade and commerce never lag behind the train of progress

and improvement; they keep apace, sometimes they are in the van. He would indeed be a wise prophet who could now foretell whither we are tending. No mortal eye can at one glance foresee the complex markets of the world. No human mind can at any instant comprehend the trade conditions of the globe. Such sight and such comprehension are imperative if legislation touching the mainsprings of trade is to be intelligently framed. We are in the presence of stupendous forces, set in motion by unseen power."

Direct control of government by the people, and, through it, of industry and of the social condition of the individual, will require in the majority of its citizenship an intelligence competent to deal with not only the questions of trade and commerce, to which I have just referred, but also with equally as complex and difficult problems affecting the social relations of the people,—problems today on which there is every shade and difference of opinion.

Are we moving towards such an ideal citizenship? If so, how long will it take before it is realized, if not, how long will it take to begin such movement?

Whether or not this insurgent movement should proceed to its ultimate logical conclusion, or be suspended at some intermediate point by a conservative, sincere and honest public sentiment,—at some intermediate point, where the benefits may be secured without too great risk from the complete democratization of government, and the socialization of industry—must be determined by the citizen of the future. That there is such risk from such control must be apparent to every man who considers the class of citizenship that is absolutely imperative in a government completely

democratized as that to which the present insurgent movement would logically lead. These considerations must appeal to every man here present. It must make every public-spirited citizen resolve to do his part, great or small, and to begin this part in his immediate environment, as citizen, as voter, as one interested in public affairs, and as one determined to do his full duty to city, state and nation. That it is worth while, I can assure you. There is a satisfaction in such work. There is a reward for this work in an approving conscience that nothing can take away from you. You may, many of you, climb high upon the ladder of your profession; you may build up a fortune in industry; you may write your name among the immortals on the tablets of fame; but I believe that none of these will give to you so keen a sense of duty done, and credit earned, as to know that you have contributed through your efforts to the good and welfare of your community, that you have made your city a better place in which to live, that you have helped to make the individual citizen of this democracy better fitted for democracy, that the democracy itself has been made better fitted to deal with the great questions which must be presented for its decision in the next few years, questions that will make so much for the good or the ill of the countless millions yet unborn. There is today no duty so imperative, no obligation so great, as the duty and obligation of citizenship.



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